Practicing Reconciliation & Dialogue

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Mercy & Reconciliation

Mercy and reconciliation are partners in the dialogue process.

Mercy is an essential ingredient to healthy relationship. We are human: we make mistakes, we err, we hurt people, and we are hurt by people. This is a fact of life. Relationships can be hurtful. But Right Relationship, community, is what keeps us alive and is to be life-giving.

Mercy and reconciliation are tools given to us to fix these relationships when we sin and when we are sinned against. In order to move forward in relationship, one must not forget the past, but be reconciled to it and to one another. This is also true and essential for healthy, positive dialogue encounters with all.

#MercyInMotion

#MercyInMotion is the hashtag created by the USCCB for social media platforms. Use #MercyInMotion to share how you are celebrating the Jubilee Year of Mercy!

Dialogue & Scripture

The goals of interreligious dialogue and ecumenical dialogue are different. One engages in dialogue with someone of a different faith tradition to promote understanding and cooperation. Ecumenical dialogue has its roots in Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one," (JN 17:21). It is a scandal for Christians to be divided. Therefore, the goal of ecumenical dialogue is to work toward Christian unity—not uniformity— in order to answer the call of Christ's prayer.

While there is no explicit prayer from the mouth of Jesus regarding interreligious dialogue, we see in the example of Christ reaching out to the religious other. Jesus did not limit his ministry to the Jewish community, but he encountered the world as it was and engaged the Gentiles:

- Jesus held the Good Samaritan as a model for right relationship, as the Good Samaritan modeled true mercy (LK 10:29-37).
- Jesus didn't save mercy just for those in his community, he healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman, a gentile (MT 15:21-28).

In the person of Christ, we find the example of proper engagement and right relationship with the religious other rooted in mercy.

Cultivating a "Culture of Encounter"

Encounter at every level is important to the practice of dialogue as a whole. It is not religions that are in conversation. Rather people of faith who practice a particular tradition are in dialogue—are in relationship with one another. From the highly theological to the particularly personal, all contributions are important for a robust understanding and encounter with the religious other. The Year of Mercy presents a wonderful opportunity to repair and refresh relationships that have been neglected--to encounter one another anew.

Pope Francis and Waldensian Pastor Eugenio Bernardini share an embrace.

A Pope of Encounter

Pope Francis has been an exemplar of encounter. He shows how mercy, reconciliation, and dialogue intersect. One example was in June 2015. The Pontiff spoke to the Waldensian community in Rome—a Christian community that suffered from persecution at the hands of Catholic authorities in the 12th -17th centuries. While this attempt at reconciliation may seem "too little too late" to some, it was a symbolic act of humility on the part of Pope Francis that opens space for true, honest, and fruitful encounter with the religious other.

Dignity in Dialogue

Engaging in interreligious and ecumenical dialogue is a way for the Catholic faithful to live the principles of Human Dignity and Religious Freedom. Dialogue is a practice. It requires inherent respect for the freedom of the individual conscience to choose the religious path to which one is called.

WHAT YOUR PARISH CAN DO

From communities that have long practiced the art of dialogue to those new to it, all are called to put into practice Pope Francis' call for a "culture of encounter." There are multiple ways that parish leaders can be welcoming and mindful in the practice of faithful and fruitful dialogue:

1. A rootedness in prayer is essential for fruitful dialogue. A simple way to start this process is to add a petition to the prayers of the faithful.

2. The parish is a community. It is also part of the larger community. Team up with another faith community for a day of service or action that benefits the shared community.

3. As a worshipping community, have honest and frank conversations about biases and preconceived notions of the religious other.

These are just a few small examples how to nurture dialogue in the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Dialogue is a collaborative enterprise, so be as inclusive as possible when constructing activities.

The Four Ways of Dialogue

Dialogue is relational and active. It is a dynamic mode of being that requires relationship, indeed friendship, with the religious other. It is encounter; it is mercy. In the document *Dialogue and Mission*, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue outlines four ways of dialogue:

(1) **The dialogue of theological exchange** is practiced among scholars and religious leaders from various traditions. It is a highly theological and nuanced way of practicing dialogue.

(2) **The dialogue of life** is about attitude and the spirit that guides personal conduct. For the Christian it is about witnessing to the Gospel in all facets of life while engaging and living peacefully with the religious others.

(3) **The dialogue of common social action** is emerging as an important form of dialogue. There are groups of varying religious backgrounds coming together to live out their faith commitments by working together to combat homelessness, hunger, the lack of workers' rights, and other social ills. The world today needs the common witness of people from all faith traditions; it needs mercy.

(4) **The dialogue of religious experience** is when those who are deeply rooted in their own religious traditions share experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, as well as religious expression.

For Contemplation & Action

Beginning the process of dialogue can be a daunting task. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, do not let fear prevent you from engaging in this fruitful, pastoral, reconciling practice. The Catholic Church has been on the forefront of dialogue, and has created a rich tradition to expand in your local worshipping community. Each diocese has an ecumenical or interreligious officer that can be of assistance for your parish community. Most major metropolitan cities have an interfaith network that would be a great resource for parishes just beginning the journey. Below you will find resources to assist you in creating, strengthening, and maintaining ecumenical and interreligious relationships.

Resources

- Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. You will find details about the national ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, as well as informational videos and other print resources. www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/index.cfm

- The Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers (CADEIO), offers training and resources to pastors and lay people who are active in ecumenical or interreligious work in their diocese. More information can be found at: www.cadeio.org

- Vatican Documents

    - *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom* (Second Vatican Council 1965) http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html

    - *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Second Vatican Council, 1965) www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

    - *Ecclesiam Suam: Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Church* (Pope Paul VI, 1964) www.w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html

    - *Dialogue and Mission* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1984) http://www.pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-and-mission_75.html

    - *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991) www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

    - *Dialogue in Truth and Charity* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2014) www.pcinterreligious.org/uploads/pdfs/DIALOGUE_IN_TRUTH_AND_CHARITY_website-1.pdf

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs